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## **CATASTROPHIC FIRE AND EMERGENCY DECLARATION FINDING AND RECOMMENDATION(S)**

**Submitted by:** KATE DARGAN ON BEHALF OF LFPC

### **Finding:**

*The forests surrounding Lake Tahoe are not healthy and their long term prognosis is poor. The condition of the Basin's forests and the risks of fire, whether caused by man or nature, present disasters waiting to happen, with severe potential for loss of life, massive property destruction, and inestimable pollution of the Lake.*

*The risk of catastrophic fires within the Lake Tahoe Basin presents an imminent threat to life, property and the environment of this nationally significant and unique natural resource.*

*Catastrophic wildfire respects no territorial boundaries, and endangers all within its path. Consequently, the Lake Tahoe Basin needs urgent fire mitigation actions across a wide spectrum of interconnected systems in order to address this clear and present danger, including fire suppression, fuels management, economic and land-use planning, and a multi-layered regulatory environment.*

*Obtaining State and Federal Emergency Declarations will assist in providing all possible solutions as rapidly as possible in order to protect the public as well as the clarity of Lake Tahoe without sacrificing necessary environmental protections.*

*A mechanism to monitor the accepted recommendations will help ensure that progress is made toward those recommendations and maintained over time.*

*Many of the Commission's recommendations, if adopted, will require implementation efforts by various governmental jurisdictions and entities in order to address the emergency posed by these risks. . Copies of the Commission's final Report should therefore be provided to all relevant government officials for review and such action as determined to be appropriate and necessary.*

### **Background and Supporting Evidence:**

*Public safety and environmental improvements in the Lake Tahoe Basin are severely threatened by the overarching hazard of wildfire.*

*The Lake Tahoe environment includes the people and communities within the Lake Tahoe Basin as well as the Lake itself.*

*Lake Tahoe is a recognized significant and unique shared natural resource, and as such, warrants a significant and unique approach to hazard mitigation.*

*The potential of the wildland fire hazard within the Lake Tahoe Basin is expertly estimated to be catastrophic in magnitude of risk. This potential was demonstrated by the 3,100-acre Angora Fire in June, 2007.*

*The threat of catastrophic fire and its specific risk to the water quality of Lake Tahoe is substantial and defined by the geographic boundaries of the Lake Tahoe Watershed Basin. This risk has predictable harmful consequences to public and environmental safety.*

*The available mitigations to reduce this risk have been identified and can be implemented with a systematic approach. These available and reasonable mitigations serve the public and environmental interest, and will result in a reduced threat to a significant and unique resource.*

*The purpose of the Emergency Declarations should therefore be to reduce the threat that catastrophic wildfire in Lake Tahoe Basin poses to life, property, and the environment and to facilitate the work that must be done to preserve and protect this unique national treasure.*

## **Recommendation(s)**

1. *The Governor's of Nevada and California should each respectively declare a statewide emergency exists in the Lake Tahoe Basin, and recommend to the President of the United States that a federal declaration of emergency also be declared.*
2. *The Emergency Declarations should address the following goals:*
  - *Defensible Space should be achieved on every residential property within the Basin within 5 years*
  - *Development of a centralized information system to inform agencies and the public of defensible space requirements and to monitor the progress of such efforts*
  - *Urban fuel treatments should be accomplished on all public urban lots within 5 years*

- *Fuels Hazard Reduction Treatments on the 68,000 acres of public open lands in the Tahoe Basin should be accomplished within 10 years or earlier, if possible, and a realistic program be developed and implemented for maintenance of these publicly owned lands in a fire safe condition in the future*
  - *A sustainable biomass removal and/or elimination plan for the maintenance of these treatments should be developed and implemented*
  - *Ignition-Resistant building standards for all new construction within the Basin should be rigorously enforced*
  - *Ignition-Resistant roofing should be required on all structures throughout the Basin within 10 years*
  - *Permanent funding partnerships between local, state, and federal revenues should be established as quickly as possible to maintain these risk mitigations*
  - *A wildfire risk model should be developed that incorporates forest fuel management, community safety actions, watershed health, and lake clarity within 5 years*
  - *Demonstration of Lake Tahoe as a national pilot model for wildland-urban-interface risk mitigation including public safety, healthy forest management, biomass sustainability, and watershed improvement.*
3. *The States' Declarations should provide that California-Nevada Tahoe Basin Fire Commission should be continued or some similar group representing the Governors of the States of California should be established in order to monitor the implementation progress of the Commission's recommendations that are acted upon by Governor's of California and Nevada.*
4. *The Emergency Declarations should not waive environmental processes that ensure water quality protections within the Basin, but should clarify the need for inclusion of wildfire risk into those analyses and the importance of moving quickly and without undue delay to ameliorate the risk of catastrophic fire to the Lake Tahoe Basin and its residents.*
5. *It is further recommended that copies of the Commission's final Report be provided by the Governors to all elected officials deemed appropriate by the Governors, and to the members or appropriate representatives of the various administrative agencies having jurisdiction within the Lake Tahoe Basin, including the following:*
- *All county commissioners of the five counties located within the Basin;*
  - *All city council members of the cities located within the Basin;*
  - *All members of the Legislatures of the States of California and Nevada;*
  - *All members of the Congressional Delegations of the States of Nevada and California;*

- *All members of the Governing Board of the TRPA; and*
- *All members or other suitable representatives of any State agencies having jurisdiction over all matters within the Basin relating to fire prevention and control, public health and safety, or the environment.*

## Impacts of Implementation:

- ☐ Cost – States will cover the costs of its own members for any continued work directed by the Governor's. See "Economic Issues" and for details of the Emergency Declaration funding.
- ☐ Funding source – Emergency Declaration revenue sources come from a variety of sources.
- ☐ Staffing – The Emergency Declaration will require additional staffing (estimated 1-2 PY) to assist in tracking, monitoring, and dispersing specific funds. It is likely this staff would be merged with other functions identified in the Commission Report or subsequent planning actions.
- ☐ Existing regulations and/or laws – California and Nevada law for state emergency declarations would need to be referenced as would federal law for a Presidential Declaration.

Analysis of impacts on the following factors is OPTIONAL:

- ☐ Operational
- ☐ Social
- ☐ Political
- ☐ Policy
- ☐ Health and Safety
- ☐ Environmental
- ☐ Interagency

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